

Yogatherapy Benefits JCC–Nampa Juveniles

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In January of this year nursing supervisor, Ruth Davis, made contact with a local health and fitness business that made a donation of yoga mats and instructional videos. The results with the juveniles at the Juvenile Corrections Center–Nampa were surprising!



“Yogatherapy” has been an interesting experience for both the instructor, Valarie Zuniga, and the students. Some of the male juveniles were a little disdainful in the beginning thinking it would not be a good workout. They have come to appreciate the “sweat” that they work up, the flexibility that they are realizing and enjoying, and the self-regulation that they are learning. They have learned that many NFL athletes use Yoga to prevent injuries by creating more flexibility in their movements and to create better balance through strengthening their core. As their instructor, Valarie has been pleased and impressed with their improvement: in the ability to stay in the postures longer; in achieving greater flexibility and balance; and in staying focused and exhibiting less distracting behaviors. They are respectful, enthusiastic, and have requested to have another day of Yoga added.

The female juveniles who participate are learning to appreciate their bodies, improve posture and balance, and strengthen their core. All of these things enhance their self-esteem and help them to view themselves in a more positive way. One of the students has asked if she can come back and help the instructor teach when she completes her program.

More than the physical benefits of Yoga, the “therapy” includes helping them learn to check in with themselves, be in a non-competitive and non-judgmental environment where they can focus on one thing at a time and feel successful. They are learning to self-regulate, they are becoming better able to relax and reduce anxiety, and they are experiencing how to be more contained in their bodies rather than being outer focused and distracted by the environment.

Yoga incorporates the art of mindfulness. Ms. Zuniga says, “Our juveniles are a joy for me to teach and I am amazed at how responsive and appreciative they are. What has been affirming for them is how quickly their bodies have adapted becoming more flexible...it is a kind of metaphor about changing and adapting in that they need to become more flexible and mindful in order to live a healthful and successful life.”

